

VIDEO

FAQ

Q I need to shoot video of our weekly football match, edit it on my PC and then burn it to DVD for my team-mates. What kind of camcorder would be best?

A An inexpensive MiniDV camcorder should suffice. But you will have to capture the video in real time to your PC before editing, which will take around 90 minutes for the whole game. The footage will have very few compression artefacts, though, so converting the edited results to MPEG2 for burning to DVD won't cause any massive problems.

You may want to consider a more expensive hard disk camcorder. It's less hassle as you can just drag and drop the video clips into your editing software, trim them down and then burn the results straight to disc. If you're editing the game every week you'll certainly appreciate the time saved.

Avoid DVD camcorders, as you'll have to change discs twice during each half. HD camcorders may shoot crisper footage, but you won't see most of this on the finished DVD, and editing will take longer and require a powerful PC.

Seth Barton

Deputy
Reviews Editor

seth@computershopper.co.uk

CANON HG10

★★★★★

£700 inc VAT

From www.empiredirect.co.uk

Hot on the heels of Canon's HR10 DVD HD camcorder comes the hard disk-based HG10. Despite many technical similarities, the two models look and feel completely different. While the HR10 has attractive curves and bronze highlights, the HG10 is a far more brutish and technical-looking device.

It's very compact, measuring only 81x75x129mm, and sits comfortably in the palm of even a large hand. Like the HR10, this camcorder uses the AVCHD format. This compresses video using the efficient H.264 codec, meaning you can get a fantastic five-and-a-half hours' footage on the built-in 40GB hard disk. This equates to at least 22 of the HR10's 8cm DVDs, or almost six MiniDV tapes. If you like to shoot lots of footage, this is one of the most convenient camcorders.

The hard disk does have its drawbacks. If you were to fill the entire hard disk, say while on holiday, you'd have to delete clips or transfer footage to a laptop. The manual warns against accessing the hard disk directly from your PC, advising you to use the bundled software. We had no problems

dragging and dropping video clips from the HG10 directly into media player software, though. There's also a Mini-SD card slot for extra storage.

Video quality is generally good, but despite the Full HD claims, the HG10 records at the same 1,440x1,080 resolution as the HR10 and MiniDV-based HV20 (below), not the full 1080i resolution of 1,920x1,080. It uses the same fantastic lens and sensor combination, though.



At the highest quality setting video is compressed to 15Mbit/s, which is slightly higher than the HR10's 12Mbit/s maximum. However, it still lacks the fine detail that HDV camcorders such as the HV20 are capable of. Swift pans and fast motion also show up minor deficiencies in the compression. It's still high-quality video, but it can't quite match the HV20's.

Despite its compact size, being both smaller and lighter than the HV20, the HG10 still includes an accessory shoe and microphone input, both of which are missing from the HR10. This makes it more appealing for enthusiasts who want better sound quality than a built-in microphone can provide. Battery life is exceptional at 148 minutes, though with all that storage capacity, it's still sensible to invest in a second battery, for around £35.

If you like to edit your footage on a PC, then a hard disk camcorder is the most convenient way of shooting video. However, you'll have to spend time archiving the results on to either DVDs or a larger hard disk, while an HV20 user has the easier option of keeping the original tape as a backup. The HG10 is an excellent camcorder, but we still prefer the HV20 due to its lower price and slightly higher video quality.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Hard disk storage
- ✓ Accessory shoe and microphone input
- ✗ Video quality could be better

HD CAMCORDER 40GB hard disk and Mini-SD storage, 10x optical zoom, 1/2.1in 2.96-megapixel CMOS, 2.7in LCD screen, mini HDMI, component, composite and phono output, USB2 interface
PART CODE 2185B001AA
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)



Also consider...

TERRATEC Cinergy DT USB XS Diversity

★★★★★

£64 inc VAT

From www.pixmania.co.uk



This USB TV tuner has a diversity mode that takes a signal from two tuners and aerials to improve reception in areas with weak signal strength. Alternatively, you can use the tuners independently to receive one programme while recording another.

The included software is easy to use, image quality is good, and the remote is clearly labelled.

The XS Diversity is the best dual tuner we've seen.

USB TV TUNER USB2 interface, dual digital tuners, 2x RF inputs
PART CODE 10456 DETAILS <http://uk.terratec.net> FULL REVIEW Apr 2007



CANON HV20

★★★★★

£562 inc VAT

From www.amazon.co.uk



The HV20 is our favourite high-definition camcorder.

It's affordable, but it doesn't sacrifice video quality and supports exciting new features such as progressive scan. You'll get excellent-quality footage in almost any situation.

It's easy for beginners to use and has enough manual controls to capture the best images in trickier conditions. The HV20 stores its video footage to old-fashioned MiniDV tapes, but don't let that put you off.



HD CAMCORDER MiniDV storage, 10x optical zoom, 1/2.1in 2.96-megapixel CCD, 2.7in LCD screen, HDMI, component, composite and phono outputs, USB2 and FireWire interfaces
PART CODE 2060B006AA
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk
FULL REVIEW Oct 2007



SANYO Xacti VPC- HD1000

★★★★

£473 inc VAT

From www.lambda-tek.com/componentshop

This compact HD 'palmcorder' from Sanyo resembles a rather menacing ray-gun, so we were a little disappointed to find no trigger-style record button. Still, it's bound to have any gadget fan instantly enamoured, being only 113mm high and weighing just 311g.

A big lens dominates the front of the camcorder, behind which is a 1/2.5in CMOS sensor with four megapixels. The Canon HV20 (below left) has a slightly larger CMOS but only 2.96 megapixels. However, the high-resolution sensor is actually a hindrance when it comes to video. Packing so many pixels on to a sensor can provide more detail, but it also increases crosstalk. This is where light falling on one pixel is falsely detected by the pixels around it. This causes errors in the colour data, which becomes noise in the image. This was evident in the resulting video.

We had further problems in low lighting. The automatic setting produced a dark and gloomy image, and the autofocus struggled to bring the image into sharp focus. In normal lighting conditions it performed better, though the autofocus was still rather sluggish.

Video is compressed using the H.264 codec at a maximum rate of 12Mbit/s. This is similar to most HD camcorders using DVD, hard disk or memory card storage.

The Xacti uses SD cards, and is also compatible with SDHC cards. An 8GB SDHC card costs about £40 including VAT, and will store one hour and 25 minutes of video at top quality settings.

Unlike many HD camcorders, which shoot at 1,440x1,080, the Xacti records 1,920x1,080 pixels. However, we preferred using the 720p setting, as it gave a smoother image when panning. There are more pixels in the 1080i video, but we couldn't see much extra detail, most likely due to the 12Mbit/s limit. At 720p, video quality was the best we've seen from a camcorder this small, though it was a long way off that of the bulkier Canon HV20.

The Xacti is easy to use and solidly made. The main controls are clustered together in a circular arrangement beneath your thumb. The menu is controlled by a small joystick and is clearly laid out on the bright and detailed 2.7in LCD screen. Sanyo has squeezed in an accessory shoe and microphone input, too.

If you want to output video directly from the camcorder, there's a docking station with HDMI/component outputs. It saves you having to plug and unplug cables, and it charges the battery as well.

The Xacti is a desirable, tiny HD camcorder, but video quality isn't up to scratch. At £473, it isn't good value.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Compact design
- ✓ Easy to use
- ✗ Poor in low lighting

HD CAMCORDER SD/SDHC memory card storage, 10x optical zoom, 1/2.5in 4-megapixel CMOS, 2.7in LCD screen, HDMI, component, S-video, composite and phono output, USB2 interface
PART CODE VPC-HD1000EBK
DETAILS www.sanyo-dsc.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)



CHOOSING A... Camcorder

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

SENSOR: 800,000 pixels CCD/CMOS

ZOOM: 10x optical/300x digital

VIDEO PORTS: FireWire out, S-video out

MONITORING: Mono viewfinder, 2 1/2in colour LCD

MEDIA: MiniDV tape

STILLS CAPTURE: optional

EXTRAS: Remote control

Recommended minimum in grey

1 If you want to shoot simple home movies, then get a basic MiniDV camcorder costing around £150. It will produce decent results in most lighting conditions. Make sure your PC has a FireWire input though, or get a camcorder with a USB port. Check the battery life, which should preferably be 90 minutes or more.

2 MiniDV stores high quality video and you'll get 60 minutes on a single tape. Common alternatives use DVD, hard disk, or memory card storage. DVD is convenient if you want to watch your video immediately without editing, but you can only get 20 minutes on each disk. Hard disk camcorders can store many hours of video, which can then be easily transferred to a PC for editing. Memory cards are limited in size compared to hard disks, but you can switch cards when one gets full.

3 If you're shooting something more involved than a family holiday then you'll want extra features. A good manual focus control will allow for more flexible camerawork, while an accessory shoe and microphone input will let you use an external microphone, greatly improving audio quality. A larger sensor, with a higher resolution, will improve video quality and let you shoot better footage in poor lighting conditions.

4 If you've got the money then HD camcorders are well worth considering. The best ones shoot very sharp and detail-filled video that really shines when played back on an HD television. HD camcorders use a wide variety of storage media, with MiniDV models offering the best video quality at present.

5 If you're serious about film-making, then a few accessories can make all the difference. A tripod will improve your results far more than splashing out on a big sensor. Spare batteries are essential for longer shoots. Plus some decent video editing software will help you produce a more polished end product.

SLING MEDIA Slingbox Classic

★★★★★

£100 inc VAT

From www.currys.co.uk

The Slingbox allows you to watch

TV anywhere in the world as if you were sitting in your living room. It streams the video from your home over broadband, so you'll need an upload speed of at least 256Kbit/s. You can use it on a home network and stream TV to a PC anywhere in your house using a wireless router.

It has SCART and S-video inputs, so you can plug in whichever set-top boxes you want. It also has a built-in Freeview tuner. It even includes onscreen mock-ups of your remote controls.

VIDEO-STREAMING DEVICE
SCART and S-video inputs, Freeview tuner, IR transmitter, 10/100 Ethernet port
PART CODE SB150-110
DETAILS www.slingmedia.com
FULL REVIEW Sep 2006

CANON MD101

★★★★★

£140 inc VAT

From www.amazon.co.uk

The MD101 is a great camcorder, at an extremely low price. It has a widescreen LCD, which means that what you see on the screen is what you get on your TV.

Picture quality is excellent in good lighting conditions, with realistic colours and very little noise. Only the lack of a USB port is disappointing.



DV CAMERA MiniDV storage, 30x optical zoom, 1/4in 0.8-megapixel CCD, 2.7in LCD screen, phono and composite output, FireWire interface
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk
PART CODE 1881B007AA
FULL REVIEW Aug 2007

